



Department of Justice

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Western District of Texas

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FEDERAL GRAND JURY INDICTS FABENS MAN FOR ALIEN SMUGGLING RESULTING IN DEATH OF 14-YEAR-OLD GIRL

Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales, United States Attorney Johnny Sutton, Troy C. Henley, acting special agent in charge for the ICE El Paso Office of Investigations and El Paso County Sheriff Leo Samaniego announced that a federal grand jury in El Paso returned an indictment against 44-year-old Jose Alfredo Sifuentes-Sandoval in connection with the death of a 14-year-old girl in April of this year.

The indictment, returned yesterday afternoon, charges Sifuentes with one count each of conspiracy to smuggle aliens, encouraging and inducing entry and harboring, both resulting in death, aggravated identity theft and three counts of alien smuggling for profit. Sifuentes' associate in Juarez, Mexico, Amalia Baquera, aka "La Tia," is also charged in the conspiracy count. The indictment alleges that from October 20, 2005, to June 9, 2006, Sifuentes and Baquera conspired to smuggle into and harbor in the United States hundreds of illegal aliens, including a 14-year-old girl from El Salvador, the so-called "Texas 20 Girl."

"Smuggling illegal aliens into the United States is a serious offense, and all too often, those who smuggle them do so with reckless disregard for human life. Today's indictment demonstrates our continuing commitment to prosecute those who violate our borders and allow innocent people to die in the process," stated Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales.

On April 27, 2006, EMS and El Paso County Sheriff's deputies responded to a 911 call from Sifuentes' residence located at 1340 Leaf Street in Fabens. When they arrived, authorities discovered the child in the back seat of a van without a pulse or spontaneous respiration. The child was taken to the Del Sol Medical Center. Attempts to resuscitate her were unsuccessful; an autopsy revealed she died of a pulmonary thromboembolism. The victim was subsequently identified by her mother as Leybi Lorena Vigil Claros. Sifuentes originally told deputies that he found the girl on the side of Highway Texas 20 and attempted to get her medical treatment. Further investigation revealed, though, Sifuentes allegedly smuggled her into the United States at the Fabens Port of Entry and failed to seek timely medical attention despite the fact he had reason to believe that she was gravely ill.

"Human smuggling is a dangerous business often with deadly results," stated U.S. Attorney Johnny Sutton. "We will do everything in our power to find these smugglers and put them in prison."

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Sifuentes indictment release
July 20, 2006
Page 2

U.S. Customs authorities at the Fabens Port of Entry arrested Sifuentes on June 9, 2006. At the time of his arrest, Sifuentes was attempting to bring two undocumented immigrants into the United States after claiming that they were his United States citizen wife and daughter. He remains in federal custody. Authorities will seek Baquera's formal extradition from Mexico. Upon conviction, both Sifuentes and Baquera face up to life in federal prison.

"The indictment of these two 'coyotes' goes to the heart of ICE's commitment to combat alien smuggling by dismantling criminal enterprises which seek only to profit from the misfortune of others," said Troy C. Henley, acting special agent in charge for the ICE El Paso Office of Investigations. "We will continue to work jointly with our federal, state and local law enforcement partners to put ruthless alien smugglers, who place hundreds of lives in harms way, out of business."

The case was investigated by United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement together with the El Paso County Sheriff's Office. Assistant United States Attorneys J. Brandy Gardes and William F. Lewis, Jr., are prosecuting this case on behalf of the government.

An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. The defendants are presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.

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